

## WHAT TO LOOK FOR IN A CHILD CARE SETTING

- ✓ Provider has training in child development and experience in the group care of children;
- ✓ Environment is safe, clean, and designed to promote learning and growth;
- ✓ Provider is nurturing and encourages a variety of learning experiences that are age- and stage-appropriate;
- ✓ Health practices are implemented and nutritious meals and snacks are served;
- ✓ Program is responsive to the children's and families' needs;
- ✓ Program solicits family involvement.

### STEP 1: GETTING STARTED

Once it has been determined what type of care is needed, it is wise to research the names of potential providers to contact.

To obtain names of potential providers, contact any of the following:

- Virginia Department of Social Services. A directory of regulated and licensed providers is available in printed form by calling 1-800-543-7545. The directory is also available on the VDSS Web site at <http://www.dss.virginia.gov/family/cc/index.html>.
- Virginia Statewide Human Services Information and Referral System at the new information number at 2-1-1.
- Virginia Child Care Resource & Referral Network at 1-866-481-1913. For the local Child Care Resource and Referral agency, please call toll free at 1-800-451-1501.
- Parents of young children
- Friends, neighbors, and people at places of worship
- School teachers
- People working in child care

After a list of possible providers is identified, it may be helpful to rank the choices based on the most favorable to the least favorable locations. Making the initial contact is the next step, and using the *Telephone Interview* form, found at the back of this publication, will help determine which providers should be considered for an in-person interview.

Before meeting with potential providers, consider using the checklist entitled *Provider Characteristics for Quality Child Care*. This identifies some desirable characteristics for child care providers and is available at the back of this publication and on the [VDSS Web site](#).

### STEP 2: GATHERING INFORMATION

There are several methods to assist in making a child care decision. Initial contact should be brief; the goal is to narrow the list to likely candidates. When it appears that a suitable provider has been found, arrange an on-site interview. Several providers should be contacted before scheduling these interviews.

Recommended methods for gathering information about the provider include the following:

- a telephone interview;
- a personal interview with the provider; and
- a tour of the child care setting.

Several visits to the child care program are recommended before making a selection. The following types of visits are recommended:

- without the child;
- with the child and the provider, and
- with the child, the provider, and the other children in care.

These visits will provide an opportunity to discuss issues with the provider as well as to observe and evaluate the setting and interactions. Depending on his/her age, the child may be able to help with the decision based upon his/her "evaluation" of the setting.

Sample questions for the telephone interview, interview with the provider, and tour of the child care setting are provided at the end of this publication.

It is important that both the parents and the child(ren) spend a sufficient amount of time at the program before making a decision. A child needs an opportunity to get acquainted, and parents need an opportunity to see how the child responds to the provider, the program, and the other children.

- Ask to tour the center/home and to observe the program in action.
- Look around all parts of the center/home, e.g., care and napping rooms, playground, bathrooms, diapering areas, stairs, entrances, etc.



## CHILD CARE PARTNERSHIP

For a successful adjustment to the program, it is crucial that families and providers work together. Open communication between parents and the provider is essential. It is important that they agree on how to handle issues such as discipline, daily schedules, nutrition, and safety. Everyone benefits when information is shared.

### HOW PARENTS CAN SUPPORT THEIR CHILD

Both the child and the provider need support. Parents should explain to the child before the first day that he/she will be staying with Mrs. Jones while they are working, attending class, etc. Explain what activities he/she will be doing. The child should know that the parent can be reached during the day. For a young child who is not able to talk about how he/she feels or is not able to comprehend what the parent is saying, it is even more important to talk about his/her feelings and give reassurance that Mrs. Jones is a wonderful person who can be trusted.

Help make this an easy transition for the child. If possible, attendance in the program should be gradual. The child's first day should be short, and then gradually increase the time. Parents should plan to stay a little longer in the mornings and afternoons to help the child make the adjustment and to provide/receive information from the provider. The child will benefit from extra attention during this transitional time.

There are several things that will help the child feel secure with the new program:

1. Develop and maintain a good relationship with the provider.
2. Make drop-off and pick-up times happy times.
3. Look for cues that the child is happy with the decision.
4. Note any behavior changes, especially those that are severe or continue.

If there are suspicions that something is not right at the center/home, talk to the child about it, and always let him know that the door is open to discuss child care arrangements.

### INFORMATION TO GIVE PROVIDERS

The attached [Emergency Contact Information](#) form included herein may be used to give the provider information about the child. Sometimes this information changes from day to day. The provider should ALWAYS have the most up-to-date information about the child.

### WHAT TO EXPECT FROM THE PROVIDER

In addition to doing their part, parents should expect that a provider will do his/her part as well. At a minimum, the provider is expected to fulfill the terms of the contract, but this usually only covers a very small part of what occurs on a daily basis. Consequently, there will be additional expectations over and above those outlined in the contract.

The provider should inform parents about significant occurrences. Examples include injuries; changes in napping, eating, toileting, disposition; child's likes and dislikes; and issues with other children, including contagious illnesses affecting other children, so parents will be attentive to possible symptoms in their child. Providers should share new child care events, e.g., changes in staff, new activities, and schedule changes.

The provider should meet the child's basic needs during the period of time the child is in her care. Parents will know if this is happening by observing whether or not a clean and safe environment is being maintained, nutritious meals and snacks are served, and children are encouraged to learn and grow. Parents should expect the provider to be pleasant to both parents and children and both should feel welcome at the child care program. As the parent-provider relationship matures, it should begin to feel like a friendship.



## MONITORING

Once a decision is made, the job is not over. It is the parent's responsibility to continuously monitor the child care arrangements. It is important to make some unexpected visits, as well as occasionally to stay a little longer when the child is dropped-off and picked-up. Be considerate of the activity that is occurring when arriving by trying to minimize the interruption. (Staying out of sight of your child and observing quietly may help curtail a disruption.) Child care providers should feel perfectly comfortable with parents stopping by at any time.

Because needs and circumstances change, parents should re-evaluate the program every three to six months and at any other time there are concerns. The areas to examine include the following:

1. the relationship between the provider and the children
2. the relationship between parent and provider
3. the discipline practices
4. the educational/activity program
5. the nutritional program
6. the physical setting
7. the playground

A sample [Provider's Report Card](#) is provided at the end of this publication.

